



CONNECTICUT STATE DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION (CSDE)

ESEA Flexibility Renewal

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ESEA Flexibility Renewal Overview

The 2015 Flexibility Renewal process will allow Connecticut to deepen its commitment to academic standards aligned to success in college and career, a multi-variable approach to educator evaluation and support, and a school accountability system that goes beyond standardized test scores.

ESEA Flexibility: Background

- In 2011, the U.S. Education Department (USED) announced that it would allow states to request flexibilities, or waivers, from certain parts of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA).
 - Connecticut was granted its waiver in June of 2012.
- The process is designed to free states from some of the most out of date and inflexible aspects of 2001's No Child Left Behind Act.
- Waivers allow states to define their own high expectations for student and school success, to develop school accountability systems to track progress in meeting state-defined goals, and to let school districts decide how best to spend certain federal funds.
- USED only provides flexibility in specific, defined areas. States must meet key requirements to qualify for a waiver.

ESEA Flexibility: Background

- USED requires states to make commitments to three core principles to qualify for ESEA flexibility, and to engage in robust stakeholder outreach.
 - Principle 1: College and Career Ready Expectations for All Students
 - Principle 2: State-Developed Systems of Differentiated Recognition, Accountability, and Support
 - Principle 3: Supporting Effective Instruction and Leadership
 - *Principle 4: Reduce Duplication and Unnecessary Burden*

ESEA Flexibility: Progress to Date in Connecticut

Since 2012, the CSDE has successfully followed through on its waiver commitments.

Principle 1: College and Career Ready Expectations for All Students

- Provided districts with high-quality Common Core resources via a new website, ctcorestandards.org
- Created a system of statewide Common Core professional learning including in-person trainings; school-embedded coaching; online, on-demand professional development modules; and trainings tailored to the needs of teachers serving English learners and students with disabilities
- Implemented the Smarter Balanced Field Test in the vast majority of school districts; alternate assessment for students with significant cognitive disabilities and a more rigorous assessment for language acquisition for English learners

ESEA Flexibility: Progress to Date in Connecticut

Since 2012, the CSDE has successfully followed through on its waiver commitments.

Principle 2: State-Developed Systems of Differentiated Recognition, Accountability, and Support

- Implemented a revamped school accountability system that provided more meaningful school classifications and took into account previously hidden achievement gaps
- Identified districts and schools with low achievement or achievement gaps; and deployed resources and new initiatives to assist with school and district turnaround, including through the Commissioner's Network, Alliance Districts program, and other efforts
- Published improved, accessible school and district Performance Reports as resources for parents

ESEA Flexibility: Progress to Date in Connecticut

Since 2012, the CSDE has successfully followed through on its waiver commitments.

Principle 3: Supporting Effective Instruction and Leadership

- Developed and adopted guidelines for local teacher and administrator evaluation and support systems
- Implemented a process to involve educators in the development and continuous improvement of these guidelines
- Ensured that each district develops, adopts and implements, with the involvement of teachers and administrators, (including mechanisms to review, revise, and improve), high-quality educator evaluation and support systems consistent with the CSDE's adopted guidelines.

The Importance of ESEA Flexibility Renewal

Failure to renew Connecticut's waiver would result in:

- A return to a limited and unhelpful system for measuring school and district performance.
 - NCLB measured a school's performance based solely on the number of students that met proficiency targets. It failed to emphasize graduation rates, student growth across performance levels, and other measures for college and career readiness.
 - ESEA flexibility enables Connecticut to take into account a broader array of measures to determine how well a school is performing, and to shine a spotlight on achievement gaps that lurked underneath NCLB-era data.
 - The waiver also empowers Connecticut to highlight the successes of schools that are closing achievement gaps or performing at a high level.

The Importance of ESEA Flexibility Renewal

Failure to renew Connecticut's waiver would result in:

- The return of restrictions on how federal funds are used.
 - NCLB required districts to spend Title I funds on federally mandated programs, regardless of whether they aligned with the community's needs and strategies for closing achievement gaps.
 - Waivers allow high-poverty districts to exercise local control to use federal funds on programs responsive to the community's needs.
 - NCLB required the CSDE to use all 21st Century Community Learning Centers funding on activities provided only during non-school hours. The waiver enabled Connecticut to use a portion of these funds to help districts extend the school day.

The Importance of ESEA Flexibility Renewal

Failure to renew Connecticut's waiver would result in:

- Virtually 100% of schools labeled as failing.
 - NCLB required that 100% of students be able to perform at grade level in English language arts and mathematics. This meant that the vast majority of schools would be considered “failing.”
 - Because the vast majority of schools would be deemed failing, resources would be required to be spread thin across schools regardless of specific need.
 - When all schools are labeled as failing, the labels are not helpful for the parents and other stakeholders.
 - The waiver enables Connecticut to provide parents with more meaningful identifications for schools.
- Prescriptive consequences for failing schools.
 - Under NCLB, there were a series of inflexible consequences for failing schools.
 - The waiver enables the CSDE to work with schools to determine the appropriate interventions based on the specific needs of each school.

Principle 1: Connecticut is Required To...

- Update its plan to describe how it will ensure all students graduate from high school ready for college and a career through the implementation of college- & career-ready standards and high-quality, aligned assessments.
- Describe how CSDE will continue to support all students, including English Learners, students with disabilities, low-achieving students, and economically disadvantaged students, and teachers of those students.

Principle 2: Connecticut is Required To...

- Demonstrate continuous improvement (CI) of the recognition and accountability system, and ensure that the system incorporates student achievement, graduation rates, and school performance and progress over time, for all students and subgroups.
- Not assign schools the highest rating if significant graduation or achievement gaps exist across subgroups.
- Provide updated lists of turnaround and focus schools and provide a timeline for interventions in these schools.
- Consider if there have been any significant changes to the state's accountability system and ensure the description accurately reflects how the state plans to make annual accountability determinations.

Principle 2: Connecticut is Required To...

- Describe the process for identifying any schools that, after 3 years of interventions, have not made sufficient progress to exit priority or focus status.
- Describe how CSDE will ensure increased rigor of interventions and supports in these (non-exiting) schools by the start of the 2015-16 school year.
- Update its plan for providing incentives and supports to other Title I schools to include a rigorous process for ensuring that districts provide interventions and supports to low-achieving students.
- Describe statewide strategy to support and monitor districts' implementation of the system of differentiated recognition, accountability, and support, including the process for holding districts accountability for improving school and student achievement.

Principle 3: Connecticut is Required To...

- Assure that the state is on track for full implementation of teacher and principal evaluation and support systems.
- or
- Indicate if requesting a one-year delay in incorporating student growth based on state assessments into educator ratings for teachers and principals of tested grades and subjects because of the transition to new assessments in 2014-15. *[Since PEAC has determined that Connecticut will request a one-year delay to incorporating state assessment results into teacher and principal evaluations, CSDE will so indicate in the flexibility request.]*
- Work with stakeholders on modifications to develop the most effective models to evaluate the teachers of special populations of students.

Stakeholder Engagement

- Connecticut is required to describe a meaningful process of soliciting input from LEAs, teachers and their representatives, administrators, students, parents, community-based organizations, civil rights organizations, organizations representing students with disabilities, organizations representing English Learners, institutions of higher education, business organizations, and Indian tribes.
- A stakeholder engagement process in line with federal guidance will be developed and rolled out in January 2015.
- CSDE will seek to enable multiple avenues for feedback, with particular focus on the areas for which substantive modifications are permitted.

ESEA Flexibility Renewal Process

- USED has asked states to amend their previously approved ESEA Flexibility requests. States must respond to prompts regarding Principles 1, 2, and 3, and provide evidence of meaningful consultation with stakeholders.
- The CDSE is working collaboratively across all divisions on the Flexibility Renewal.
- The Northeast Comprehensive Center (NCC) has been engaged to assist with project management. NCC is a federally funded center that provides free technical assistance to states.
- Consultation with stakeholders about the components of ESEA flexibility implementation has been on ongoing process, and stakeholder engagement regarding the renewal is an extension of that continuous process.

ESEA Flexibility Renewal Process

ESEA Principle	Lead Offices
Principle 1: College and Career Ready Expectations for All Students	Academic Office
Principle 2: State-Developed Systems of Differentiated Recognition, Accountability, and Support	Performance Office & Turnaround Office
Principle 3: Supporting Effective Instruction and Leadership	Talent Office
Stakeholder Engagement	Office of Student Supports and Organizational Effectiveness

ESEA Flexibility Timeline

- January 7th: Initial presentation to Connecticut State Board of Education
- January and February
 - Continued and renewed consultation with stakeholders
 - Amendments to sections drafted
- March 4th: Connecticut State Board of Education Presentation
- March 31st: Flexibility Renewal Application due to USED